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THE CITY OF THE ROYAL PAVILION

BY W. D. HOWELLS

EVERY large town in Great Britain has its penny railway guide, which is framed as far as may be on the lines of the enduring Bradshaw. The large cities, like London, Liverpool, Manchester, and Edinburgh, have each an A B C guide which alphabetically instructs how and when to get away from it and how to get back, but indulges no vagaries as to other arrivals and departures at the objective point. We trusted the London A B C to bring us to Tunbridge Wells, and we were not betrayed; we chose a hotel, with alternates, from it, and we could not blame it because all these hotels were full-up. But when it came to going, for instance, from Tunbridge Wells to Brighton, we were thrown, in our fear of the labyrinths of Bradshaw, upon the penny guide of the place. The reader, sitting at ease with this REVIEW in his hand, will think it very simple to choose between an express train leaving at 3.28 and a way train leaving at 3.45; and so we found it; but we chose the 3.45, without noticing the 3.28, and we knew nothing about that till the most amiable of porters got us a most eligible compartment in it. Then we cast about for our baggage, and it was nowhere to be seen, though it was of very visible bulk, and the porter began looking into the different vans for it, but finding it in none. We had sent it in good season by an out-porter with a hand-cart, and we blamed him severely, for the express train would start in five minutes. Our railway porter ran to and fro, and climbed dizzy heights commanding views of other platforms, and at last discovered our trunks on the platform of the 3.45 train for which we had ordered them to be delivered. It was now too late for it to be brought subterraneously across to us; guards were whistling excitedly, porters shouting, bells ringing; there was only a moment for getting out of our compartment and thanking and feeling

our faithful porter, who instantly ran off and applied all his strength to the convex back of an old gentleman who was trying to leave the train, but whom he pushed into it, and shut the door upon as the express pulled away.

It would have been some consolation to know why the old gentleman wished to leave the train at that moment, or why the porter would not let him. It would have been some relief to have indulged a habit of profanity, but we could not form that habit on the spur of the moment; we could only vent a helpless rage in some blank invectives, and we did not think to inquire about the old gentleman till some time afterward. No doubt he was wrong, or the porter would not have pushed him back; and no doubt we were wrong, or we would have known about the 3.28, and the out-porter would have left our baggage in the right place for it.

After all, we thought it no great hardship to be going by the 3.45. It could not be so very long getting to Brighton if the express got there in an hour, and we should see something of the junctions where we changed; junctions are always so amusing. Another most amiable of porters told us, while he labeled our luggage, that there would be no change for an hour; he soothed our nerves with gentle condolence, and, as far as a just man might, he insinuated a pleasing censure of the out-porter for our blunder; the out-porter might have known about the 3.28; it almost came to that. I will always say that the English railway porters are the kindest men in the world; and if ever I am quite broken in spirit I shall wish to go and live among them, supporting my lacerated self-respect against their soothing sympathy, and letting them take my self-reproach away by the excuses they will suggest for my crimes, and my blunders worse than crimes.

I am sure that this tranquilly labeling porter, who dabbed toward his cap with his paste-brush in acknowledging our tip, could not have known of the junctions beyond that first junction an hour off. We took it for granted that we should be well on the way to Brighton there, if there were others we need not mind; and if we were mistaken, what have we really to complain of now? In three or four hours we did at last reach Brighton by a train perhaps only normally behind time, and there was a great deal of excitement if not experience at all those junctions. If there was anything wanting, it was a want of tea, for the junctions were all strangely

barren of refreshments; everywhere there were news-stands, but no lunch-counters. Everywhere there were crowds of impatient passengers, and everywhere patient authorities of high or low degree, who did not resent being asked the third or fourth time whether the next train would be our train; it did not matter that it never was. I will say, though, that the prevalence of junctions adds appreciably to the cost of travel in England. You must see that your luggage is taken out of the arriving and put into the departing van, and you must fee a porter for helping you do this. If he is the porter who takes charge of your hand-baggage, you cannot, for instance, make his fee less than a shilling, though I have heard that the English sometimes make it sixpence, and ladies threepence, and widows and orphans no one knows how few farthings. Still, such is the home comfort, the almost Asiatic luxury, of an English porter who takes charge of your hand-baggage and your large luggage, and insures their going with you from junction to junction, that the money is well wasted; and my regret is not now for the wild profusion of that many-junctioned journey from Tunbridge Wells to Brighton. It is for the sad, sole instance in which a faithful fellow swiftly changed us and our belongings from train to train, and then ran along by our carriage while his wretched beneficiary searched every pocket for a piece of silver, however large or little, and found nothing, not a penny, in any pocket. We were obliged to shout the fact to the porter halting in the rear, and to cry him mercy; we had more need of it than he of money; but I knew not in what terms, if any, he granted it.

The incident cast such a gloom over our spirits that we did not notice how dark it was outside when we reached Brighton—I ought to say the Brighton station, which is not only far from the tourist's or visitor's Brighton, but is itself of such extent that it seems as if you could not start from it with the reasonable hope of ever leaving it behind. Our porter, of the brave, kind lineage of all those other porters, found us a fly where there seemed to be no flies, and disinterred our trunks from the luggage of our train which had agglutinated other trains at the many junctions till it now stretched half across England, and the luggage from its vans mounted to the skies. I do not know how he knew our trunks; perhaps it was through the unerring divination of porters, who must read it from the owner's

anxious physiognomy; or perhaps in this case he discerned its American character. When he had impossibly put it on our fly, and the driver had roused his aged and ailing horse from what looked like coma, the horse did not fall motionless in his tracks, as we feared, but broke into a galvanic gallop, quite of its own initiative, and after long passages of time and space, through suburban and urban streets and avenues, brought us suddenly upon the shining stretches of the Brighton beach, with resplendent piers flung glittering out over the sea, and hotels rising height upon height and flaming to the stars. At almost the proudest of these we stopped, and were welcomed by the head-porter and his underlings, from whom we tried to hide our shame for the small sum we paid for our fly, and more especially for the massive brass-bound wooden trunk which when we bought it in Boston had not looked the crude, cruel, American thing it now appeared.

According to precedent, at Tunbridge Wells we ought to have been turned away to roam the night; but we had wired for rooms, and we had got back a reassuring wire, and almost before the lady in the office was able to give us our keys we were in our seaward bowers, looking out on the black water which mingled the solemn voice of its surges with the bursts of rag-time revelry from the piers and the incessant clatter of heels and hoofs on the promenades. There was no time to wonder in which nearest shadow our fly-horse, his duty heroically done, had fallen dead; dinner, a placard in the passage to the dining-room had warned us, was over at eight, and it was now half-past. When we pushed in, however, we found ourselves in the gentle keeping of those inimical German waiters who lurk everywhere in England to betray her as soon as they have learned the language; other people were dining round us at leisure, and when our own dinner was served it showed no resentment of our delay in the lukewarm flavors which characterize a belated dinner in American hotels.

At once that winning note of personal consideration was struck which welcomes the guest of the English hotel. It was there for us, that hotel, not we for it; and it urbanely accepted our tacit excuses for our retarded train; it as tacitly begged us not to mind; it was nothing; it often happened; and would we have thick soup or clear? If we hurried the meal it was quite our own affair, but, as a matter

of fact, we did hurry; for we had a passion for Pierrots which we fancied we could satisfy on those piers burning out over the sea, and sending back bursts of music and applause. Pierrots had been our passion ever since we had seen the prince of them at Llandudno six years before; I could not prove he was the prince; but they are all of a sovereign delight, for there is something in the human faces when painted white like a wall, and roofed with a black, white-tufted skull-cap, and something in the human figure when widely trousered in white, and black-tufted down the middle of a jacket reaching to the knees, which takes the heart with transport. All the English love those engaging creatures, and have them everywhere, so that we grieved and wondered not to come upon any of them that year till late in September, when we found a band of them under the Leas at Folkestone, where, helping form their audience of seven, we found much of their pleasantry confidentially addressed to us. Now, when we were making so sure of them at Brighton, suddenly the music and the applause at the pier-end ceased; the lights there began to fade, and the people, gorged with the joy of Pierrots, by us untasted, streamed densely landward and joined the throngs pacing the beaches and the shore-side promenades. We made what we could of the sound of street-singing at a corner; we walked up into agreeable squares and gardened places, where on the steps and pavements before large, old, friendly, late-Georgian houses people of both sexes were talking and laughing under the soft night, and perhaps flirting, and tried to assuage our disappointment in wondering, since these mansions seemed devoted to Private Board, just what Public Board might be. It is a question which teases the inquiring mind in all the summer resorts (you must really say watering-places) of that Happy Isle, and we returned with it unanswered to our hotel, where we found again in the porch the old couple we had left there. They seemed country folk of some simple kind, and we made believe they did not know they were in Brighton out of season, which we more proudly knew. We wished we knew *them*, but the social improprieties forbade, and we left them silently looking at the crowds passing by on the hither and the thither sidewalks.

In our sophistication we recognized it for a lower middle-class crowd, mainly cockney, which was there for over a

Sunday of the non-season. The season at Brighton, as I need not tell the polite reader, is now in the autumn, when people who are really people are there in the keeping of their houses or hotels, or carriages or motors, as real people are everywhere when they come for their pleasure. The autumnal season lasts into the early winter, and an examination of *Who's Who* will prove that many persons of distinction, if not rank, live at Brighton the year round, or that segment of its circle which the English spare to their home life from their sojourns in Italy, Norway, Switzerland, and the south of France. I had a fancy that I would like to live there myself, not only in those agreeable squares and gardened places, but in many tall, wide, old early-nineteenth-century houses along the sea-front. The residential town has, after the perverse manner of towns, grown quite in the other direction from these mansions; but I hold firmly to them; the villas of Hove are not nearly so sympathetic, and I do not believe the rents are so low; at any rate, not half so many of the houses are to let.

The next morning it was Sunday, and, though it was the non-season, the people who thronged the sea-front lawns and paths of Hove looked so much like society people that they might almost have been a detachment of the Hyde Park church-parade, now so largely disbanded. I venture the conjecture timidly, ready instantly to take it back; but I am firm as to the lower middle-class crowd which swarmed past the hotels and down upon the beaches and upon the piers, and seemed to have thickened overnight to twice their mass, and to be momentarily thickening. Atlantic City is the only American standard of comparison for the English watering-places which I know of, and only at Easter does Atlantic City rival them. What these masses did in order to enjoy themselves one could not very well ask them, but to be away from work in lover-pairs is perhaps pleasure enough between sixteen and twenty-five, and to have come off with the children anywhere from home is sufficient holiday for fathers and mothers under forty. There seemed to be things doing on the piers; there were rowboats and sailboats off the beaches, which were themselves a distraction, with their surges and their sands, and their donkeys and bathing-machines. Not alone were the drinking-places open; there were many and many eating-places where the hungry as well as the thirsty might stay themselves. But, besides, there was

a provision, novel to me, for picnickers who wished to spend the day in a semblance of seaside cottagers. A long stretch of the front where it began to be low cliffs was built up with rooms comfortably furnished, which could be taken for the day, and the young children put to sleep on couches in them, while the father wandered off with the elder, and the mother spread the table with lunch and waited his return at the door, so that he might know it from the hundreds of other rooms just like it. It was all very simply English and home-like, and I could think of many things less charming than these kindly sojourns, with their outlook on the thickly peopled beach, the sociable surges and inviting pleasure-boats, with a gentle electric tram ambling over the roof to and from the Municipal Aquarium.

We ourselves went to the Aquarium, but I do not know that I should urge it upon the reader. It seemed to us that we had seen all those fish before, or else fish like them; and perhaps we went to the Aquarium because it was open on Sunday, and the famous Pavilion of George IV. was closed to visitors. It was the wish to see this Pavilion and not the Aquarium which brought us to Brighton. At another season we might have seen fashion, or that outside of it which is the best of it, perhaps; but in August this was not possible. Besides the Aquarium, which I would not decry, the town does not offer much to polite curiosity except the Pavilion. We did, indeed, desperately drive around the parks and gardens, including Preston Park, where, when it was Preston Manor, Anne of Cleves, the last wife whom Henry VIII. divorced, dwelt serenely forgetful of him, and comfortably ignorant of the fact that if she were living now she could not be presented at Court. It cannot be denied that these pleasures enhance the charm of a metropolis of gayety which, even when it is not gay, is something charming, like a dull, reposeful woman, who at least does not bother. Quiet streets, not noticeably reverberent of the leisurely trams; Sunday-shut and silenced shops; large residences facing somewhat somberly on the squares, unmindful of their statues and fountains; little houses ranging down the side streets, as if with the self-respectful English subservience, in attendance on those mansions; over all the English sky, irresolute between sun and rain: surely it is not bad; surely it is rather good. Everything is in order and in repair; without our striving of demolition and destruction, there is

evidence of recent growth; and there is some history, though not much, lurking in the background: with Romans, of course, and Saxons and Normans; Brighton is not far from Hastings, where the great battle was lost and won which made England; and there is record of French descents upon her beaches to burn and pillage early in the long wars between the two nations. Some French people are still to be seen and heard there, but they are as peaceable as so many Americans, and may have come over to revere the monument to the Sussex men who fell in the Boer War, or to see the very good loan collection of English pictures in the Gallery or the two thousand pieces of English pottery in the Museum, as we did.

Much more likely, however, they have come to wonder at the Royal Pavilion, as we had, and to feel that in its wild architectural unreason it has still a sort of logic that pulls it together and gives it unity. It stands very low upon perfectly flat ground, and even so long ago as William IV.'s time was so shut round from the sea by other buildings that neither that monarch nor Queen Victoria cared to sojourn in it. But when once it leaves the sward it bubbles and spires up in domes and minarets and steeples from roofs resting on fantastic Moorish arches, and leaves the spectator free to say whether it is more Russian or Chinese or Saracenic in that strange feeling for the bizarre which is its unifying motive. It had an architect, of course—the well-known Nash of bold invention, who must have imagined it, but whom one does not clearly distinguish from the master he served. It was first built for George IV. when he was Prince of Wales by another architect, but it was Nash who, quarter of a century later, remodeled it to its present effect for the King, and it is of the King only that one thinks in its presence.

Upon the whole I did not find myself disposed to grudge him the entire satisfaction which it must have given his lawless soul. In such an abode alone could such a man house himself to his full comfort, and I will not blame him, for it seems to me that he has had blame enough. All royalties, I am afraid, have a bad time from their birth, and it is not strange that they turn out such blackguards as they often do; it is strange that they ever turn out as well as they sometimes do, poor things. When one considers the preposterous nature of their training for a station no man ever

has a right to hold, one must forgive them very much; one must be at least as tender of them as of their subjects, who are responsible for the false position to which a prince is born and bred, especially if he is to be a limited monarch, with the apparent power of a despot over their persons and purses, but mortifyingly snubbed by the constitutional restraints.

From the university of illusion and delusion which the kingship is and always has been, such a prince as George IV. could be graduated only by excelling in badness. If he had been born plain and dull and true he could scarcely have helped being spoiled, but as he was born beautiful and charming and false, he had no chance for his life; and I think it hard he should be blamed for being what he could not help becoming. He was doomed to be a liar, a drunkard, a glutton, and men and women joined him in carrying out the sentence which was scarcely self-imposed. He had to put on debt as he had to put on fat; and it was not so meritorious of the people to pay his debts, though much has been made of it. After he had married one woman to please himself, as most other men do, he was forced to marry another woman to please the State, and it has been counted against him that he was brutal to his second wife. He was certainly wrong in that, but he had his excuse if not justification in her personal uncleanness, her flirting, and her other follies. Standing in his Pavilion at Brighton, one could not wonder at his putting her as far from him in it as he could; and if he was fond of horses, I did not object, he being what he was, that he should

“A stately palace dome decree”

for their subterranean housing, which has since been built up and over into a “noble assembly and concert-hall.” He pleased himself with interiors as fantastic as the outside of his Pavilion, and there is a Chinese Corridor, with music-rooms and banqueting-rooms, dining-rooms, royal apartments, all in a mixed Oriental taste and of a gorgeousness which I did not grudge his shade. Rather it hurt me that among other objects in the Gallery there should be certain caricatures of him in the brutal fashion of the time, and even more it grieved me that his wife, Mrs. Fitzherbert, should be savagely mocked in one of them as if she were not his wife: I think it showed her borne away by the Evil One.

Upon the whole, if one likes Brighton (and I did for reasons not quite given), one must thank George IV. for one’s

pleasure. To be sure, Brighton was discovered, as it were, by the famous Dr. Russell, who proclaimed one day to the early-eighteenth-century world that the sea-bathing there would be very good for ailing lords and commons, and upon whose reports numbers of sick dukes promptly resorted thither, whether to their advantage or not I cannot say; but they brought fashion in their train. The place seems never to have had the charm of Bath, or even of Tunbridge Wells, but it was no doubt very gay, or George IV., as Prince of Wales, would never have come to give it the stamp of his supreme approval. He discovered that it was good even for well people, and not only the Royal Pavilion, but Brighton itself remains his monument.

A great American millionaire, whose love of horses is an honor to his country, has of late years run, if not driven, a tally-ho coach between London and Brighton in continuance of venerable tradition. We preferred, however, the swift train which makes the fifty miles in one hour instead of five; but I do not know why we preferred the Pullman car on it to any first-class English carriage. Perhaps we were homesick, and wished to repatriate ourselves in that supreme image of American travel. But now, being at home, I have the heart to say that an English carriage is incomparably more comfortable than the Pullman car, which the English have adopted to their own notions, but still left irreparably Pullman. Yet I do not know why I grumble at it, for, though we had bought chairs in it, we spent all but a few minutes in the restaurant-car waiting for our two-and-six luncheon. This was very good when it came, though long despaired of, and our wait for it gave us time and opportunity for the acquaintance of a fellow-traveler who presently betrayed that he had been in the States, and had had the time of his life there. It was a piece of most smiling good fortune to meet such a friendly spirit, and his talk made it seem much less than an hour to London. When we had parted from him there, he came hurrying back to our aid on the station platform, where we stood waiting to choose our baggage from the successive vans, and entreated us to let him be of use; everybody in the States had been so kind to him. It made me glad, and I tried to think of some favor I could ask him, but I had to allege my long experience of English travel in denying his help. Yet when such things can happen, what may we not hope from International Arbitration? W. D. HOWELLS.